





**(Above)** Blue-tipped 30mm rounds — among the more than 20,000 medium-caliber rounds Radford AAP produces each day — ride a conveyor on their way to be inspected.

**(Far right)** Plant worker Brian Linkous cuts spaghetti-like strands of propellant into the lengths required for each type of round.

# AMMO MAKERS

Story and Photos by  
SSG Alberto Betancourt

*Virginia's Radford Army Ammunition Plant produces a range of projectiles and propellants for the nation.*

**N**ESTLED in one of a series of narrow valleys of the Appalachian Mountains in southwest Virginia, one of the nation's largest ammunition plants steadily provides munitions and propellants to America's military forces.

Since 1941, the Radford Army Ammunition Plant has helped fulfill the nation's munitions requirements. Part of the U.S. Army Materiel Command and operated by the civilian contractor Alliant Ammunition and Powder Company LLC, the plant sprawls over 6,900 acres and produces nearly 20,000 medium-caliber rounds daily. It also makes more than 4,000 pounds of propellant hourly, giving it the capability of producing some 133 million pounds of propellant per year in more than 50 configurations.

"If you're going to make ammunition, for the most part it all starts at Radford," said LTC Brian Butler, RFAAP's commander. "We make the propellants that go in just about every kind of round used by all of the military services."

Butler said the plant operates 24 hours a







**(Above)** Michael Scott performs a final inspection on 25mm cannon rounds destined for the guns of Bradley fighting vehicles.



**(Right)** Sharon Davis cuts strips from a “carpet roll” — a sheet of cotton-based material that will ultimately become part of the propellants.

day and employs about 1,500 workers.

“I’m most impressed with our contractors and government employees, who dedicate their lives to ensuring that our warfighters get the best products available,” said Butler. “They do an awesome job.”

John Cain, who works inside the plant’s Medium Caliber Operation Center, said working at the plant is a family tradition.

“My father worked here for 40 years, and I’ve been here 13,” said Cain. “I believe I’m helping to support my country, because everything we make will help our men and women in uniform.”

Cain’s attitude echoes throughout the plant, said William Nestor, who’s been a quality-assurance specialist for more than 25 years and has been working at the plant for two years.

“The employees know I monitor their work to ensure they’re doing everything correctly,” said Nestor. “But they all know the ultimate customer isn’t me, it’s the soldier in the field. When that soldier pulls the trigger, he or she doesn’t have to wonder if the round will work.”

Butler said for the past 60 years the plant has been providing America’s military with the propellants needed to fight our wars.

“I believe we’ll continue doing that for many years to come,” he said. □



**(Above)** James Tolley runs the splitter operation at the rolled-powder area, where sheets of propellant are cut and later made into the 12-inch “carpet rolls.”  
**(Right)** Jerry Wickline watches as primers are inserted into cartridge cases.

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